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SOIL CONSERVATION SERVICE NEWS

REGION 4

Comprising States of Louisiana, Arkansas,
Oklahoma and Texas, except High Plains Area

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CHIEF ADDRESSEES AGRICULTURAL WORKERS

Defense of the soil--the nation's basic asset--is an integral part of national defense, equal in importance to armaments, Dr. H. H. Bennett, Chief of the Soil Conservation Service, declared when he addressed members of the Texas Agricultural Workers Association in Dallas January 12.

In discussing the subject "Permanent Systems of Farming," Dr. Bennett referred frequently to Service demonstration projects in Texas--Temple, Lindale, Garland, Dalhart, Hereford and Channing. He praised the soil conservation districts program as "farmer cooperatives established for the specific purpose of controlling erosion" and as having the "spirit of community enterprise." The Chief estimated that by 1950 soil conservation districts will cover about 367 million acres of the nation's farm and range land.

"At this very moment, people in other parts of the world are warring with each other to gain or hold land," Dr. Bennett declared. "In this country, we now have in abundance what those nations are fighting for. But we must also fight against the steady soil removal and soil deterioration which is now taking place in every state and in every important farming section . . . While we have an abundance of land, we do not have enough high-quality, erosion-resistant land. And we certainly cannot afford to waste any of it."

"The cost of erosion is little short of appalling," he continued. "Erosion not only removes plant nutrients; it carries away at one disastrous stroke the available plant food, the material from which plant food is made, the micro-organisms that aid in the manufacture of

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available plant nutrients, the substance that holds these organic and inorganic materials, the seed, fertilizer--the whole body of the soil--the farmer's principal capital and the source of life. Once soil leaves the field, it is as irretrievably lost as if consumed by fire.

"Moreover, the after-effects of erosion are almost as damaging as the original impact. Soil washed out of upland farms and ranges is burdening stream channels all over the country. It is accumulating behind dams in reservoirs built for municipal water supply, irrigation, flood control, recreation, and electric power production. . . Over the country as a whole, the erosion damage to state highways is in the neighborhood of fifty million dollars a year," the Chief declared.

Dr. Bennett quoted from observations made recently by Dr. W. C. Lowdermilk of the Soil Conservation Service concerning erosion in Europe and the Near East.

"In Palestine, Dr. Lowdermilk found the land damaged to such an extent that restoration to its former conditions is utterly impossible," Dr. Bennett said, adding: "Right here in Texas--after less than a hundred years of agricultural occupation over most areas--enough soil has probably been lost to support the people of Palestine for countless generations."

Turning to demonstration projects in this state, Dr. Bennett said in part:

"The achievements in the Elm Creek demonstration area near Temple are especially illustrative of what has been done and what can be done to save the soils of Texas. The whole project deserves the careful attention of all who are interested in permanent systems of farming, but I want particularly to describe the work that has been carried out in one section of this great soil and water conservation project--in the watershed of Wilson Hollow, a tributary of North Elm Creek.

"Here soil conservation plans were made without regard for county boundaries or even farm boundaries. The prime consideration was to protect the land as a whole--to lay out the controls along natural rather than artificial lines. During the past five years or so, farmers of this particular drainage have worked in cooperation with Soil Conservation Service technicians--and in extremely close cooperation with each other--to establish measures for erosion control. Today these measures are effectively holding soil and water on 165 adjoining farms that cover 30,000 acres in a solid block--the largest continuous area of conservation-treated farm land in the country. . .

"When I visit this area along North Elm Creek, I come away more encouraged--more optimistic about the ability and the eagerness of American farm people to establish permanent systems. In a somewhat less tangible form, I find the same general spirit prevailing in many other parts of the nation today. Beyond any question of doubt, this country has made more progress in the direction of conservation and better

land use during the past ten years than throughout its entire previous history. In fact, the 1930's may well go down in American history as the decade of conservation."

In discussing the immediate economic benefit of soil conservation and good land use, Dr. Bennett referred to findings of the Lindale project economic studies as "a concrete example." This study of 60 essentially similar farms in the project area near Lindale was begun in 1935. Forty of the farms were among the farms placed under agreement with the Lindale project; 20 of them were not.

"The establishment of conservation practices produced a certain financial advantage the first year out; and as time went on, this advantage increased steadily," the Chief declared. "Year after year, evidence continues to pile up that conservation farming on thousands and thousands of farms is financially advantageous--that it is a paying proposition.

"On the basis of experience so far, I believe it may be possible to estimate, as a national average for farm lands, a financial dividend of fifty dollars per acre over a ten-year period for farmers practicing soil conservation. If this estimate is anywhere near accurate--and I believe it to be conservative--the 20 million acres in this country that have now been treated for soil and water conservation should produce a financial dividend of at least a billion dollars to the farmers and to the country within the next decade.

"In the light of these considerations, it becomes apparent that money spent by farmers or by government agencies to further the work of soil conservation districts will not be simply an outlay--but really an extremely sound and shrewd investment, both for the individual and the Nation.

"Even if no financial dividends were involved, however, conservation of our most basic natural resource would be eminently worth the price," he declared. "After all, it is impossible to place a cash value on the productive soils of a nation. As soil washes downhill, down the streams, down to the wastes of the ocean, so goes opportunity, security--a gradual wasting away of the chance for men to make a living on the land. In a very real sense, the man on the land is a part of our national backbone. Permit his base to wash out from beneath him and we leave the whole economic and social structure undermined, threatened. That is why I believe this Nation cannot afford to delay the prosecution of a far-reaching, determined, and persistent program for conservation of its soil. Defense of the land from erosion is an inescapable part of national defense."

MARSHALL TELLS AGRICULTURAL WORKERS
ABOUT DISTRICT PROGRAM

"The soil conservation districts program is indeed the democratic process in agriculture and the intense interest of farmers in such a program is indicative of a new spirit of self-help among the agricultural population," V. C. Marshall, administrative director of the Texas Soil Conservation Board, of Temple declared at the meeting of the Texas Agricultural Workers Association in Dallas January 13.

"In the early stages of the district work the farmers are leaning rather heavily on agricultural technicians for help," Mr. Marshall continued. "To many of the farmers, erosion control is an almost entirely new undertaking and it takes time to become familiar with the techniques involved. The ultimate objective, however, is an increased amount of participation by the farmer in the planning and installation of a conservation system.

"In some of the older districts of other states, it has been found that once the farmer obtains a clear understanding of soil conservation, he can carry on with a minimum amount of technical assistance.

"A great deal of education work is necessary in the preliminary stages of the district program so that all farmers may become thoroughly familiar with the aims and objectives of the program," Mr. Marshall said. "And due to the technical requirements for planning, installing and maintaining some of the erosion control practices, each individual farmer will need a certain amount of technical assistance, amounting to an estimated 20 percent of the total cost of establishing a conservation program on the farm.

"From almost every point of view it becomes desirable to develop conservation plans and apply them as soon as possible over the entire erodible portions of the nation's agricultural land. This is a tremendous job--too big in fact for any single agency of government to carry out single-handed. It will take 10 or 20 years of intense cooperative efforts by a large number of agencies--federal, state and local--and a lot of hard work on the part of thousands of farmers. But I think Texas, and the rest of the nation, is now in a better position to move forward and to realize a satisfactory solution of land and water conservation problems on a wide front."

Mr. Marshall reported that Texas farmers are "eagerly entering into the district program even though they expect to contribute at least 80 percent of the cost of establishing erosion control practices on their land."

"It is their program and they recognize it as such," the administrative director declared. "Having been shown the way, they now desire to go ahead on their own initiative as much as possible."

GUY K. FLETCHER

On January 5, 1940, at Natchitoches, Louisiana, Guy K. Fletcher was laid at rest. He died Wednesday morning January 3. A great loss has been sustained not only by those who knew him, worked with him, loved him, but by those indirectly affected by his life and work.

A native of Colfax, Louisiana, and a Bachelor of Science graduate from Louisiana State University, Mr. Fletcher for 10 years was county agent of Franklin and Natchitoches Parishes with far more than just the full accomplishment of his job to record his tour of duty with the Extension Service. Prior to joining the Extension Service, he served two years as principal and agriculturist of the High School at Franklin, Louisiana. Mr. Fletcher came into the Soil Conservation Service in January 1935, his first assignment being as chief erosion specialist at the Minden, Louisiana, project. He served as acting project manager at Natchitoches for a brief period before he was appointed in December 1935 as the first regional agronomist with headquarters in Fort Worth. On April 1, 1936, he became State Coordinator for Louisiana, a position he held until his death. His work as state coordinator was enviable successful. This work always will offer bold testimony to the earnestness of his efforts, the sincerity of his purposes, and the wisdom of his actions in accomplishing his assigned and planned tasks.

KUDZU FOR EROSION CONTROL IN REGION 4

By E. H. Greene¹

Looking toward an expanded utilization of kudzu in the conservation program, Service work units in the high rainfall areas of Arkansas and Louisiana will plant about 150 acres to this crop during the next two months.

Kudzu, a perennial leguminous vine native to Japan, has been used successfully in parts of Arkansas, Louisiana and Texas but its use has been limited almost entirely to gully control work. Technicians who have requested sufficient planting stock to plant 150 acres during the next few months plan to put it on critical slopes within cultivated fields and on eroded cultivated land which is being converted to hay land.

Technicians from Region 4 recently made a tour of areas in Region 2 where kudzu is being used successfully for a variety of conservation purposes such as hay crop, stabilization of eroded areas, roadside erosion control and gully control. Observations revealed that the farmers of Region 2 are highly enthusiastic about kudzu and its use is wide-spread.

It has great value as an erosion control plant; as a soil improving plant; as a grazing crop and is an excellent hay plant.

Careful attention is required to establish kudzu, but when it becomes firmly established it is very aggressive. In spite of its aggressiveness, however, it is easily eradicated and never becomes a pest.

The viny nature of the plant permits single runners, under favorable conditions, to grow from 50 to 75 feet long in one growing season. These runners have nodes and wherever a node comes in direct contact with the soil, roots are set. The internodes die and the rooted nodes become independent plants. These are called crowns. New plantings are established by the setting of these crowns.

Kudzu leaves and blossoms are similar to those of velvet beans with the exception that kudzu leaves are hairy while velvet beans produce a smooth leaf. The kudzu seed are somewhat similar to speckled peas, but are only about one fifth as large as the pea seed. Kudzu sometimes is called "foot a night vine" and "porch vine."

The experiences of those farmers who have successfully grown kudzu show that it must be planted on well drained soils; that good land preparation is essential; good planting stock is required--preferably 2-year old crowns or strong, healthy seedlings; that proper setting of planting stock is essential--setting so that the bud of the plant will be level or slightly below the surface of the soil; fertilization with basic slag or phosphate fertilizer is helpful; cultivation

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the first year is essential and disking in February of the second year is necessary if sufficient runners have developed.

The heavier, well drained soils are most favorable for kudzu but it will eventually establish itself on the deep sandy soils if the proper care is given to insure the development of a good stand.

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DISTRICT PROGRESS IN LOUISIANA

A total of 1,072 Louisiana farmers, who control 203,949 acres, had entered into agreements with the eight operating soil conservation districts on January 1, according to a summary made by H. B. Martin, acting state coordinator in Louisiana.

At that time, 118 farms covering 30,267 acres were being planned as a preliminary step to the signing of agreements by the landowners and the supervisors of the various districts.

The Louisiana districts have received 3,037 applications from farmers who wish to establish complete conservation systems on 640,624 acres. Conservation surveys have been completed on 657,325 acres in the districts.

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DISTRICT PROGRESS IN OKLAHOMA

On the fifteenth of December, 4,120 Oklahoma farmers had applied to supervisors of 19 of the 21 operating soil conservation districts for help in conserving their resources of soil, water, timber and wildlife and in applying good land use measures.

At that time, Leo S. Wortman, state coordinator for Oklahoma, reported that 1,579 farmers who operate 282,289 acres had entered into cooperative agreements with these 19 districts. Two other districts, which recently entered into memoranda with the Department of Agriculture, had not begun operations in December.

When the report was compiled, farm plans were being prepared on 270 farms with a total area of 66,420 acres. Fifty-six farm plans, covering 8,026 acres, had been prepared and sent to the landowners for signature.

Conservation surveys have been completed in Oklahoma districts on 2,760,702 acres.

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DISTRICT PROGRESS IN ARKANSAS

The 14 operating soil conservation districts in Arkansas and 3,092 farmers have entered into cooperative agreements to establish complete conservation systems on 436,852 acres, Glenn E. Riddell, state coordinator for Arkansas, reported as of January 1.

Since the districts program began, 5,891 farmers have applied to the supervisors of their respective districts for assistance.

In addition to the agreements already signed, 136 farm plans covering 17,944 acres had been prepared and presented to the land-owners for signature. There were 161 farm plans in process of preparation on January 1. These plans cover 24,671 acres.

On the first of the year, conservation surveys had been completed on 2,589,394 acres in Arkansas districts, Riddell said.

Fifty-nine educational meetings held in December drew an attendance of 2,665 persons. In addition, 14 meetings were held with groups of farmers to consider planning and program execution. A total of 238 farmers attended these meetings.

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NATIONAL PROGRESS IN DISTRICTS SHOWN

As of December 15, a total of 217 soil conservation districts covering nearly 120,000,000 acres had been organized in 26 of the 36 states that have enacted district legislation.

The Department of Agriculture had entered into Memoranda of Understanding with 156 of these organized districts making it possible for technicians of the Soil Conservation Service to assist farmers in planning erosion control programs for their lands and in putting conservation practices into effect.

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CIVILIAN CONSERVATION CORPS PRAISED

The annual report of the late Robert Fechner, director of the Civilian Conservation Corps, has evoked newspaper praise both for Mr. Fechner and for the CCC. One of these editorials is the following, from The Dallas, Texas, News:

"The work of the late Robert Fechner will live after him even in the fortunately unlikely event that Congress should abandon the Civilian Conservation Corps. The particular timing of official reports now outlines to Congress what the late director thought should be done with the corps, though the torch had fallen from his dead hand a few days before the 1938-39 report was filed formally with Congress on January 14.

"Surveying the country from the vantage point of several years experience, Director Fechner noted that thirty to fifty years will be required to round out the CCC task. Even then, the corps will probably remain a necessity in altered and abbreviated form for the reason that much of its work is of a nature which requires consistent application. We cannot expect that all of agrarian America will be tutored into carrying on its own battle against soil erosion, for instance, without suitable and official prodding.

"Actually the Fechner thirty-fifty-year estimate was limited in its application to projects already suggested for the 1,500 camps now at work. The work has been and is well worth while. Its conservation results have been enormous, not only in the physical reclamation of ravaged American soil, forest and stream, but in the human and physical values built up in Young America that the CCC has kept at work.

"The final Fechner report marks an advanced mile-post in his six-year service. He had done wonders with the corps and the corps has fallen no whit short in what it has done for the country."

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